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SUBJECT: REPORTS OF SPLA CLASHES WITH MISSEIRIYA ARABS

11. (SBU) Summary: Sudanese news media reported December 24 that Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces clashed with nomadic Misseriya Arab tribesmen on December 22 and December 23 along the Kordofan-Bahr al Ghazal border. Newspapers quoted Misseriya sources claiming 30 SPLA soldiers and nine Misseriya tribesmen killed, while SPLA sources reportedly claimed 20 SPLA soldiers and 30 Misseriya tribesmen killed. An SPLA spokesman in Juba told emboffs December 27 that the reports were exaggerated and claimed that while a Misseriya cattle herder was involved, there was no clash between SPLA and Misseriya tribesmen. End summary.

12. (SBU) The clash, first reported by a local daily Al-Sahafa December 24, reportedly started when SPLA soldiers arrested a Dinka cattle herder working for Arab Misseriya tribesmen on December 22, accusing him of carrying weapons. This reportedly resulted in an altercation which left four Arab tribesmen dead. The following day, Misseriya tribesmen reportedly attacked an SPLA camp in Grenti in northern Bahr Al-Ghazal with the assistance of Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Popular Defense Forces (PDF). The SAF has denied they or the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) took part in any attack.

13. (SBU) An international NGO in Abyei told poloff on December 27 that a UN security briefing in Abyei confirmed the reports of clashes between SPLA forces and SAF supported tribesmen. The UN reported that a joint military team composed of SAF and SPLA forces will travel to the area tomorrow which the UN identified as being 230 kilometers north of Abyei. According to the UN, fighting continues.

14. (SBU) Separately, SPLA contacts told emboffs December 27 that 100 Misseriya tribesmen attacked a platoon-sized element of the SPLA on December 22 in an area near Grenti, killing 22 SPLA soldiers. During an SPLA counterattack, the Misseriya suffered an unknown number of casualties. According to the SPLA, there was no further fighting after December 24 and the situation is stable. The SPLA contact opined that the SAF encouraged the Misseriya to attack the SPLA to destabilize the area around the 1/1/56 border. The contact said that a committee, which includes SPLA Major General Paul Malong, is heading to the Aweil area on December 28 to prevent further conflict between the two forces.

15. (SBU) Comment: Due to the scarcity of reliable observers in the area, there are a number of discrepancies in these reports. However, multiple reports to date indicate that a high-level joint SPLM-SAF team will travel to Grenti to assess the actual situation and attempt to prevent further conflict. Given the impending redeployment of both SAF and SPLA forces to their respective sides of the 1/1/56 border, this incident may offer either side a pretext to delay or halt further troop movements, at least in this particular area close to the oil fields. Observers note that there have historically been seasonal skirmishes between Arab Misseriya herders and SPLA (predominantly Dinka) soldiers in this region, as

the herds move south in search of better grazing.

POWERS